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**IRAQ**

**PRIMARY HEALTH  
CARE PROJECT**

# TECHNICAL BRIEF

## Iraq's Expanded Program on Immunization Decreases Vaccine Preventable Diseases



Photo: USAID / PHCPI

### Background

In Iraq, relatively high levels of immunization have been attained; however, there has been a decline since 2010 for almost all vaccines (i.e. rates of B.C.G and Hepatitis B 3rd dose decreased from 85% to 67% and 83% to 75% respectively). In an effort to increase vaccination coverage and immunization management, Iraq has developed the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI). EPI is playing a vital role in maintaining and promoting community health through a reduction in morbidity and mortality of vaccine preventable diseases. Strengthening of routine Supplementary Immunization Activities (SIAs) is crucial for the achievement of EPI targets and objectives while training of health staff, local social leaders and NGOs on basic elements of immunization is necessary to achieve quality immunization services.

USAID's Primary Health Care Project in Iraq (PHCPI) has worked to raise immunization awareness, increase vaccination coverage, and improve vaccine management, all key aspects in addressing Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 4, reduction of child mortality. PHCPI specifically addresses this goal by providing training to health care providers, traditional birth attendants, and community partners on the importance of proper nutrition and vaccinations for the healthy development of infants and young children. Furthermore, the project has provided guidance on the identification and management of childhood illnesses, how to measure growth progress, and the importance of food hygiene and safety.

A more user-friendly surveillance system focusing on immunization and child growth will be introduced to PHCPI's 36 Model Clinics to provide the Ministry of Health (MOH) and Directorates of Health (DOHs) with timely information for action. Additional assistance will be provided to 29 District Health Offices to increase their role in Iraq's Vital Statistics System, permitting them to play a more active role in the identification and monitoring of child mortality and addressing the leading underlying causes of death.

Finally, PHCPI has developed clinic-level outreach strategies to reach underserved rural communities in order to provide increased access to vaccinations, as well as information on nutrition and treatments of communicable diseases afflicting children under five. The expected outcome of these interventions is an increased number of children receiving the necessary vaccinations to keep them healthy - a key indicator for MDG 4.

### PHCPI Guidelines and Trainings Lead to a Strong Cadre of Vaccinators

PHCPI has worked closely with the MOH to develop, update, and disseminate guidelines, job aids and conduct training workshops. Specific PHCPI interventions include:

- Developed a handbook on Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) for paramedics;
- The AFP Guidelines consist of two chapters containing health worker protocols for the Expanded Program of Immunization as well as procedures for the immunization campaigns;
- Developed guidelines/protocols for vaccine cold chain management;
- Developed guidelines/protocols for the detection of immunization side effects;
- Conducted technical orientation meetings on guidelines and procedures for EPI health workers in all provinces;
- Held workshops for vaccinators on developed guidelines.

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Photo: USAID / PHCPI

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Photo: USAID / PHCPI

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PHCPI activities have led to over 630 vaccinators being trained on EPI, AFP, vaccination side-effects, vaccination guidelines, cold chain management for vaccines, vaccination ages, and the schedule of vaccination. Twenty EPI workshops were conducted in selected provinces in coordination with the MOH as in the table below.

Province	No. of workshops	Participants
Baghdad/Rusafa	4	144
Baghdad/Karkh	4	150
Karbala	3	90
Najaf	4	137
Basrah	3	89
Kirkuk	2	67
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>677</b>

### **Strengthened Immunization through Increased Coverage and Improved Management**

The development of guidelines, trainings, and workshops has led to improved immunization and cold chain management as well as an increased number of children under five receiving full immunization. With training and EPI information, health providers have become more familiar with vaccine boosters, mixed vaccines, and the age at which to administer each vaccine. Participants were energized and recognized that the program seeks to achieve the national objectives of protecting all members of society from communicable diseases. Additionally, vaccinators can now adequately respond to the World Health Organization's recommendations for the eradication of polio, measles, and tetanus, and to prevent outbreaks of Hepatitis B, meningitis, and influenza.

PHCPI's interventions have provided significant impact for vaccine management at both primary health care centers (PHCCs) and during immunization campaigns conducted throughout Iraq. Vaccinators and health care providers are now prepared for and excited about these activities that will lead to expanded immunization coverage countrywide for both newborns and children under five, resulting in a reduction in child mortality and attainment of MDG 4.